

New Members of Congress Face Tough Challenges

Congressional Voices: Reps. Allen West, Terri Sewell and Robert Dold Talk about Issues Facing the Country

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By Katie Couric

(CBS) CBS Evening News anchor Katie Couric speaks with three new members of the House of Representatives Rep. Allen West (R-FL), Rep. Terri Sewell (D-AL) and Rep. Robert Dold (R-IL), as the 112th Congress convenes.

A retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, a Harvard-educated lawyer, and the owner of a pest control business walk into the halls of Congress. But there's no punch line to this story, just a big punch list of problems.

For the new Republican majority - and its 87 freshman - the pressure's on.

"You two Republicans may be dealing with overly high expectations," Couric said. "Are you

concerned about that?"

(Scroll down to watch the full interview from @katiecouric.)

"There are expectations out there," Rep. West said. "But I think that people are going to be looking for those positive indicators and trends in those first 90 to 120 days that we're going in the right direction. No one is expecting you to come in and turn the aircraft carrier around right in the first month or the first two months."

At times calling government "tyrannical" and "despicable," West rode the Tea Party wave to Washington. He says the movement's not done yet.

"If we don't go in the right way as far as the fiscal responsibility," West said. "You will see a third party grow up in the United States of America."

But Robert Dold - who hails from a moderate district in the Chicago suburbs - was

non-committal when asked about the Tea Party. "The problem I think with some of the Tea Party is that you talk to a Tea Party group here and you talk to a Tea Party there and they may have different goals, specific individual to their groups."

Outnumbered almost 10-1, freshman Democrats like Alabama's Terri Sewell face their own challenges.

"Is it daunting to come into office at a time when Republicans are so ascendant," Couric asked.

"I think it doesn't really change our mission and our job," Sewell replied. "I think that the folks that elected us sent us here to do their bidding. Irrespective of who's in the majority, they really want us to focus on their issues."

Republicans say high on their priority list is deficit reduction - starting with major cuts to domestic spending this year. Fiscally conservative freshmen say everything's fair game.

"Let's take a look at the Department of Defense," Dold said. "And send a signal to those on the other side of the aisle that everything has to be on the table."

"Is there a danger, in your view, Congressman West, that the axe will be too sharp, that the cuts will be too deep," Couric asked.

"I think if there is an opportunity for us to finally have that honest conversation with the American people and make some of the hard decisions and hard choices, it's right now because the people understand the dire economic situation that we're in," he replied.

But the Republican effort to repeal health care reform has grabbed the most headlines.

"What this law does is, it addresses access to insurance," Dold said. "It is designed not to address cost or quality, which is what the American people have been crying out for."

Sewell, however, respectfully begs to differ. "I can tell you that we benefited, you know, greatly,

day one, in my district. Was it a perfect bill? No, it was not a perfect bill. But it was a very good start."

Their ideologies are as different as their backgrounds. But this group is still hopeful they can work together - more or less.

The word compromise is in their vocabulary at least for now.

"We might disagree on 50, 60 percent of stuff," Dold said. "What's the 40 percent that we agree on?"